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Kabul 07° Cloudy | Kandahar 11° Sunny | Herat 9° Sunny | Jalalabad 19° Sunny | Mazar-e-Sharif 11° Partly cloudy | Bamyan 0° Snow

Islamic Emirate supports businessmen, investors, Mawlawi Kabir



KABUL: The Deputy Prime Minister for Political Affairs Mawlawi Abdul Kabir, said the Islamic Emirate supports businessmen and investors of the country. The deputy PM Mawlawi Kabir made the remarks

during a meeting with a number of businessmen and investors of the country, his office said in a statement Sunday.

Abdul Qadir Wadan a national businessman spoke on behalf of others and present-

ed his plan for the construction of a sugar manufacturing factory, according to the statement. "With the takeover of the power by the Islamic Emirate in mid-Aug 2021, tangible development has been made in

various fields, as hundreds of major development projects have been implemented and thousands of people provided with jobs countrywide," the statement quoted Wadan as saying.

Wadan added that he will introduce a standard machinery from abroad in the near future, which will be directly used by the farmers, and will create work opportunities for the people.

Welcoming them, Mawlawi Kabir said that the Islamic Emirate has always been committed to supporting national businessmen and investors and providing them with necessary facilities inside the country.

The deputy PM for political affairs according to the statement went on as saying that all administrations of the Islamic Emirate are making efforts to accelerate the investment process and address challenges facing businessmen and investors in the country.

Javed Husain

"Re-establishment of Islamic system has been a blessing from Almighty Allah," Mullah Khairkhwa

KABUL: The Acting Minister of Information and Culture Mullah Khairullah Khairkhwa, in a meeting under the theme of "Responsible system and prosperous nation" said the re-establishment of the Islamic system has been a blessing from Almighty Allah.

The meeting was attended by a number of high-ranking government officials including the Deputy Publication Minister of Information and Culture and the Acting Deputy Governor of Herat province, Mawlawi Hayatullah Muhajer Farahi, the ministry said in a statement Sunday.

Addressing the meeting, Mullah Khairkhwa said that the world believed that the Islamic Emirate could not control Afghanistan, but despite lots of problems, the country is moving towards progress and development, as hundreds of development projects have been implemented within the past two years across the country and hundreds of others are being implemented, according to the statement.

"No one has the right to close the door on the people. The Islamic Emirate is the system of the people. If your voice is not heard

from one door, go to the other door," the statement quoted Khairkhwa as saying.

Meanwhile, Muhajer Farahi said that all officials of the Islamic Emirate are busy in serving the people and the society.

"All doors of the government are opened to the people and the one who doesn't serve the people or not address their challenges, he is not a member of the Islamic Emirate, but he is against the Islamic system," the statement quoted Farahi as saying.

M. Nabi



Afghan, Iranian officials discuss trade, transit

KABUL: The inaugural meetings of joint committees between Afghanistan and Iran have been held to boost trade and transit between the two countries, the Office of the Deputy Prime Minister for Economic Affairs said in a state-

ment Sunday.

The meetings were held at the customhouses of the two countries and discussed several important issues including reviewing previous agreements, increasing the level of trade and transit and address-

ing challenges facing the traders of both nations, the statement said.

Both sides agreed on increasing working hours from 8 hours to 16 hours at the customs of Islam Qala, Abu Nasr Farahi and Nimrooz, and three

border customs on the Iranian side, the statement further said, deciding to significantly increase the number of daily vehicles transporting goods, raising the figure from 550 to 1,200. In the meetings, the decision has also been made to lift the 20-day ban on Iranian trucks entering Afghan territory, aiming to promote trade and transit between the two countries. Furthermore, the Iranian side announced the cancellation of 104 U.S. dollars as an entry fee, while the Afghanistan side also removed 5000 Afghanis as an entry fee.

This joint committee's meetings are a follow-up to the agreements established during the official visit of Mullah Abdul Ghani Beradar Akhund, the Deputy Prime Minister for Economic Affairs to Iran.

The Kabul Times



15 development projects completed in Ghazni



GHAZNI: Fifteen development projects worth 11.3 million

Afghani (some 161,154 U.S. dollars) have been completed in the

country's central province of Ghazni, the provincial Municipi-

pality said in a statement Sunday.

Ghazni's provincial Mayor Mawlawi Mohammad Nabi Hamza said the projects included toilets, bridges and 13 sub-streets have been implemented in various parts of the province, according to the statement.

The mayor emphasized that the primary objective behind the implementation of these projects is to enhance the city's aesthetics and provide essential facilities to the residents as well as expressed the municipality's commitment to execute additional public projects in the province.

Dozens of development projects have already been implemented and thousands of people provided with job opportunities in the province.

The Kabul Times

Kabul blast claims two lives, wounds 14

The blast took place at about 6:30 pm local time, in the Dasht-e-Barchi area of Kabul city, according to police officials.

KABUL: At least two civilians have been martyred and 14 others wounded, when a heavy explosion hit a minibus Saturday evening in a crowded area in the country's western capital Kabul, police confirmed.

The blast took place at about 6:30 pm local time, in the Dasht-e-Barchi area of Kabul city, according to police officials.

"Unfortunately, the blast targeted a minibus and based on initial information, 2 people

were martyred and 14 others injured as a result, Kabul Police spokesman Khalid Zadrani wrote on his official X page.

He said an investigation was carried out into the incident.

The Kabul Times

Plastic factory inaugurated in Maidan Wardak



MAIDANSHAHR: A plastic-producing factory worth 9.5 million Afghani (some 135,484 U.S. dollars) has been inaugurated in the country's central province of Maidan Wardak, the provincial Industry and Commerce

Department said in a statement Sunday.

Provincial Director of the Industry and Commerce Department Engineer Mohammad Khan Zawak said the factory has the capacity to produce 1 metric ton

of plastic within a day, according to the statement.

Engineer Zawak added more than 200 people are directly and indirectly provided with job opportunities in the factory.

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Food for thought

"Hijab has direct link to morality of individuals in society."

How to reduce air pollution and save life

Air pollution in the country's major cities, particularly, the capital Kabul is feared to take lives of many residents, mostly children.

The mortality rate has also recently increased in the capital, due to the lack of seasonal rains and the use of smoke-producing objects, as well as burning plastic and rubbers in the kilns and public baths.

The lack of seasonal rains is also another factor behind air pollution in Kabul city, as the capital is grappling with a significant and persistent air pollution problem.

Likewise, the city's rapid urbanization, increased industrial activities, population growth, and inadequate infrastructure have contributed to the deterioration of air quality, according to analysts.

On the other hand, the high number of vehicles, including old and poorly maintained ones, contribute to a significant portion of air pollution in the city.

Unregulated industrial activities, especially in manufacturing and construction sectors, release pollutants into the air as well extensive construction activities and improper dust management contribute to particulate matter pollution in the city, where thousands of people are facing negative outcomes and death.

Also, according to analysts, reliance on fossil fuels and inefficient energy sources, such as coal and biomass, for heating and cooking purposes, releases harmful pollutants.

All these factors have gathered to strengthen air pollution that poses significant health risks, leading to respiratory problems, allergies, and increased susceptibility to respiratory infections.

The negative impact of air pollution is seriously affecting public health and reduced productivity and can result in increased healthcare costs and economic losses, as well.

So, the causes, impacts and potential solutions should be sought by environmental experts to combat air pollution in the capital.

Strict regulations on vehicle emissions, industrial pollution and construction practices should be implemented and enforced.

As experts believe, public transportation, cycling, and walking should be used, while investing in infrastructure for these alternatives and the use of clean and renewable energy sources, such as solar and wind, for heating, cooking, and electricity generation should be promoted.

Awareness campaigns, are also, one of the most important factors which should be conducted about the health impacts of air pollution and citizens on sustainable practices should be educated.

Cooperation and coordination between the related organs and the people should be considered seriously to reduce the undeniable harms of air pollution in the capital.

IEA making efforts to combat unemployment



Afghanistan, a nation already grappling with the aftermath of war, is now facing a surge in unemployment and household debt, according to a recent assessment by the Biruni Institute.

The study, conducted since the Islamic Emirate's takeover, revealed a significant rise in unemployment and household debt in the country.

Nevertheless, the Ministry of Economy and the Ministry of Labor and Social Affairs of the Islamic Emirate have acknowledged these issues but said that they are working to combat poverty and unemployment in the country.

This includes the implementation of entrepreneurial projects and the distribution of work permits to thousands of people.

The country's ministry of labor and social affairs has said that over 100,000 people including thousands of women have been appointed on various jobs in the country in the first nine

months of the solar year (1402).

According to a press release issued recently by the ministry of labor and social affairs, 109,824 persons, including 26,326 women had been appointed on jobs in the first nine months of the current solar year in the country.

The ministry has said that the aforesaid women and men had been appointed on jobs in various government and private institutes in Afghanistan, adding that 1,489 foreign nationals had been given work licenses during this period of time.

The ministry has stressed that only those women were allowed to join jobs which were directly needed in the concerned agencies.

This comes amid of increasing poverty and unemployment in the country.

The Biruni Institute's study has unveiled the unemployment rate in the country. It says the unemployment rate among men has surged by a

significant 31%, while the rate among women has risen by 8%.

These figures are not mere statistics; they represent the struggles of Afghan families trying to make ends meet.

The study's findings also highlighted that the percentage of indebted households within the sample group more than doubled from 30% to 67% between July 2021 and July 2023.

Many families, burdened by the growing debt, have been forced to sell off assets, including land and property, to cope with the drastic loss of income.

This distressing cycle of unemployment leading to debt, followed by asset liquidation, is indicative of an economy in dire straits.

This escalating situation in Afghanistan is a pressing concern for international aid organizations.

It's clear that more than immediate aid, the nation requires strategic interventions

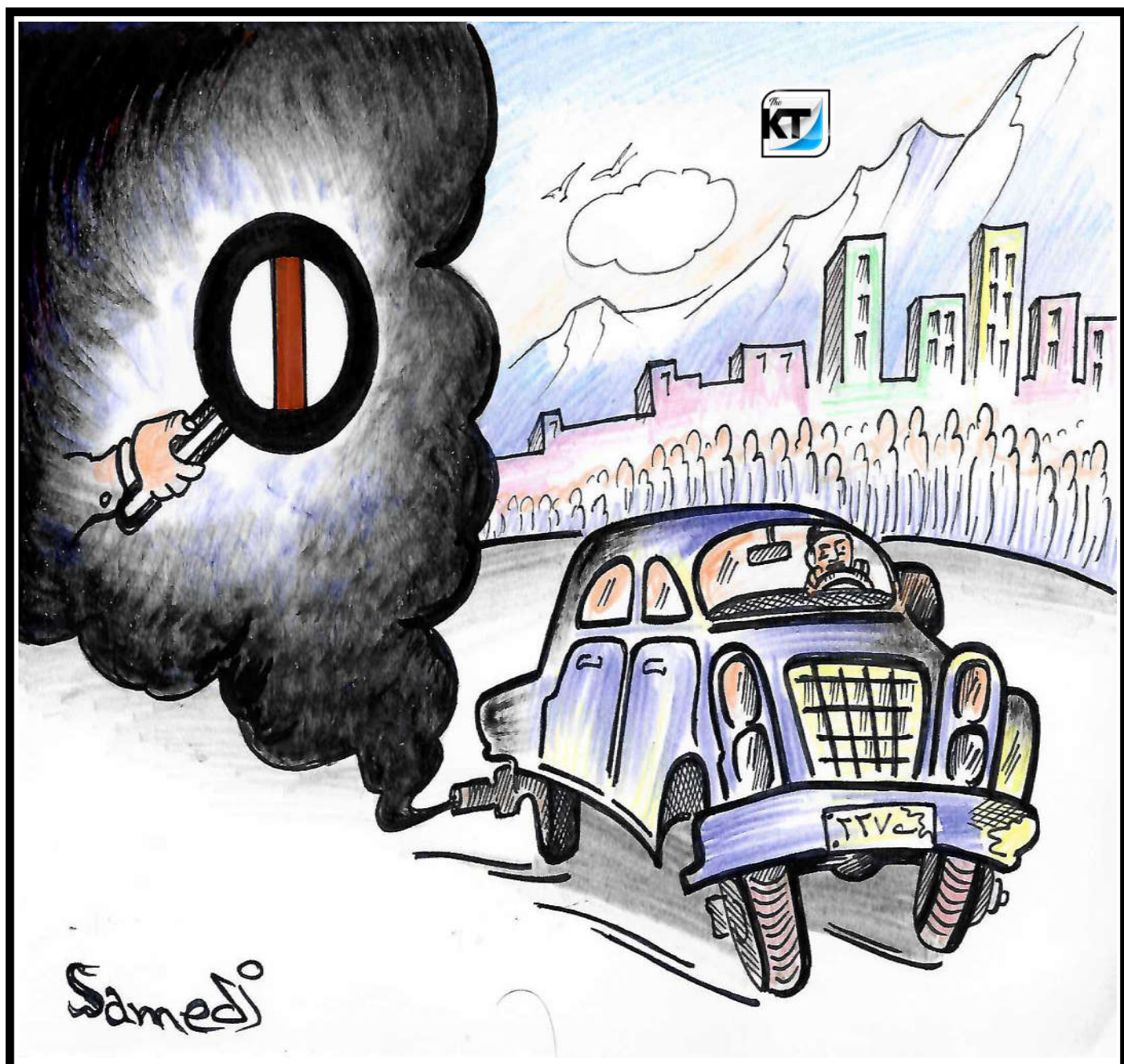
to rebuild its fragmented economy and provide its citizens with a sustainable living.

With increasing the unemployment rate in the country, the good news is that thousands of people have been appointed in various government and private institutions in the past one year.

The Islamic Emirate has started work on hundreds of development projects in the country so that more and more people can get employment.

With the Islamic Emirate takeover, continued efforts have been made in combating poverty and unemployment in the two past two years.

Despite the fact that hundreds of thousands of people have been appointed in various government and private institutions, the unemployment rate is still high in the country. It is time that the Islamic Emirate takes further steps to address the increased poverty and unemployment crisis in the country. **S.Raqib**



Afghanistan’s tourism industry will soar to new heights in 2024

Fortunately, Afghanistan’s tourism industry has achieved remarkable success on the international stage this year. Foreign tourists have been visiting the country, exploring its historical reservoirs, ancient sites, and natural landscapes in various regions. As a result, Afghanistan has made a strong impression and gained recognition internationally in the field of tourism.

This positive trend has raised hopes and predictions that 2024 will be a prosperous year for Afghanistan’s tourism industry, which bodes well for the country’s security and stability. Recently, the British newspaper Independent published an article highlighting this development and forecasting that 2024 will witness significant growth and progress in Afghanistan’s tourism industry.

According to the travel company “Lupine Troll,” the newspaper emphasized the improved security situation in Afghanistan, presenting favorable opportunities for tourists to travel to the country. The enhanced security measures have attracted international tourists, who have been able to visit Afghanistan’s historical and ancient sites. Additionally, the captivating natural landscapes in various provinces have piqued the interest of foreign visitors, who come to celebrate festivals and enjoy the festivities amidst these picturesque settings.

Considering these factors, Afghanistan’s tourism industry has achieved unprecedented progress this year, and there is optimism that the country will gain greater prominence and international attention in the realm of tourism.

Officials from the Ministry of Information and Culture have informed the media that a



significant number of foreign tourists have arrived in the country in the past two years. Their visits have contributed to projecting a positive image of Afghanistan’s security on the international stage.

Officials at the museum archive in Herat province reported that over the past nine months, approximately 9,223 foreign tourists, along with Afghan students and scholars, have visited the museum. Similarly, many foreigners have explored ancient sites and locations in the northern and central provinces. The ongoing winter season and snowfall provide further opportunities for travel for these foreign tourists. The foreign visitors have expressed their satisfaction with the established security and the allure of Afghanistan’s natural scenery and historical sites. They have pledged to recommend Afghanistan’s secure and captivating destinations to their

families and friends, encouraging them to also experience the country’s natural and historical wonders. Essentially, a country’s historical and natural landscapes showcase its grandeur and magnificence. The more abundant a nation’s such sites and ancient monuments, the more extensive and prosperous its tourism industry becomes. Afghanistan boasts rich cultural heritage and remarkable natural landscapes. Throughout history, it has been invaded and conquered by numerous foreign rulers, leaving behind a legacy that spans over five thousand years. Thus, Afghanistan’s tourism potential is vast, and the industry should be appropriately developed and expanded to accommodate this potential. Many countries worldwide generate substantial revenue from the tourism industry, such as India, China, Greece, Egypt, and others.

The tourism sector will be

developed and promoted in line with current requirements. While acknowledging the efforts made so far, it is evident that the tourism industries of the aforementioned countries have played a significant role in their economies, security, and overall development. Now that security has been established in Afghanistan after forty-five years, it presents the best opportunity for the growth and advancement of the tourism industry. This involves restoring ancient monuments and settlements, establishing upscale hotels in the provinces and Kabul, ensuring a robust transportation system for travelers, facilitating marketplaces for trade, and providing all necessary facilities, equipment, and opportunities for tourism according to international standards. Afghanistan has the potential to offer services on par with other countries in the industry.

Alemarah

Saffron worth \$27m exported in 8 months, ministry

KABUL: Saffron worth up to 27 million U.S. dollar have been exported over the last eight months, the Ministry of Industry and Commerce (MoIC) was quoted by media as saying.

According to the ministry’s spokesperson Akhundzada Abdul Salam Jawad, the overall quantity of saffron is nearly 3 metric tons, and it is exported to various countries of the world, the private TOLONews reported.

“During the eight months of the 1402 solar year, about 28,620 kilograms of saffron, worth 27 million dollars were exported, mostly to India, Saudi Arabia, the United Arab Emirates, Turkiye, Indonesia, Spain, Germany, the U.S., and England,” Jawad said.

Meanwhile, the Afghanistan Chamber of Commerce and Investment (ACCI) said in addition to the fact that the price of saffron has increased in the world market compared to the previous government, the production of this product has also increased.

“Saffron used to be cheap compared to the past, especially during the republic government. But now, the prices have since gone up, and the production of saffron has grown in comparison to the past. However,



ever, its transportation is a bit difficult,” said Khanjan Alkozi, a member of ACCI.

According to saffron exporters, despite the fact that Afghanistan has been going through multiple droughts for a number of years, farmers’ efforts have resulted in a significant output and export of saffron to nations around the world. Businessmen asked the

Islamic Emirate to provide more facilities for transporting saffron to foreign countries through air corridors.

“Fortunately, Afghan saffron has found its place in the global market. We are hopeful that we will have more exports and that the Islamic Emirate will pay more attention to the export of Afghan saffron or transfers of this product,” Mohammad

mad Nadir Maliki, a businessman, told TOLONews.

According to the Ministry of Agriculture, Irrigation and Livestock (MAIL), 200 farmers have received training to enable them to increase the production of this spice in other provinces in an effort to promote the saffron plant throughout the nation.

Staff reporter: Mashal Noori

Ethics of Islam: Vices and methods of cleansing one’s self from them

Living in this world peacefully with others and obtaining the best of eternal blessings could only be accomplished by having taqwa.

Things that harm men in this world and in the next are due to vices.

The essence of man’s spiritual loss is his having vices. Man’s avoidance of vices is called taqwa. Taqwa or piety is the most precious of all worships.

Decorating something requires that the thing first should be cleansed from all dirt and stains. Similarly, neither any reward (thawab) will be given nor any benefit will occur for the worships unless the man who does those worships cleanses himself from the sin. The worst of all vices is disbelief (kufr).

The good deeds of a person who does not have belief will not bear any fruit for him in the Hereafter.

[A disbeliever who is killed unjustly does not become a martyr and will not go to Paradise.] The foundation of all virtues is taqwa. One should try hard to obtain taqwa and advise others to do the same.

Living in this world peacefully with others and obtaining the best of eternal blessings could only be accomplished by having taqwa.

Vices cause disease in the heart or soul.

Any increase in this disease will cause the death of the soul, i.e. it will cause kufr. Disbelief (shirk), which is the worst of all vices, is a fatal poison of the soul. Some people who do not have belief claim: “My heart (spiritual) is clean. You should look at my heart.” Their claim is no more than empty words.

A dead heart cannot be clean. There are many types of disbelief. The worst of all is polytheism.

Any variety of a certain vice is mostly specified with its most outstanding characteristic. For that matter, the word shirk used in ayat-i-kerimas and in (our blessed Prophet’s utterances termed) hadith-i-sheriffs represents all sorts of kufr (disbelief).

Allahu ta’ala, in the 48th and 116th ayats of the Sūra Nisā of the Quran states that He will never forgive the polytheists (mushriks).

These verses point out that disbelievers will burn forever in the Hellfire. [“Shirk” means to attribute partners to Allahu ta’ala.

A person who does the attributing is called a polytheist and the thing which is attributed is called partner (sharik). To believe that someone possesses one of the attributes of Divinity means to make him a partner (sharik).

The attributes possessed exclusively by Allahu ta’ala are called “Attributes of Divinity.” Some Divine Attributes are the following: Existing eternally, creating, all-knowing, and healing the sick.

To believe that a human being or the sun or a cow or any other creature possesses a divine attribute, and thus to respect or beg that being or creature, is called to worship them.

Those things become an idol. To say words that mean

the deification of such people or to speak respectfully before statues, pictures or graves of disbelievers assumed to be possessing divine attributes means to worship them and therefore it is polytheism.

If one believes that a person does not possess a divine attribute but instead he is a person loved by Allahu ta’ala or alternately if one believes that that person has served his nation much and therefore deserves respect, paying respect to his statues or pictures is not disbelief or polytheism.

Nevertheless, since paying respect to any person’s picture is forbidden (harām), anyone doing so becomes a sinner (fasiq).

If he slights the fact that it is forbidden, he will become an apostate (murtad), and so will those who flout a prohibited action (haram). Since those Jews and Christians who are not “mushriks” do not believe in the prophethood of Mohammad (PBUH), they are disbelievers.

They are called “Disbelievers with a heavenly book.” Presently, most Christians are polytheists because they attribute divinity to the prophet “Isā”, that is, Jesus ‘alaihis-salam’. Christians belonging to the sects of Barnabas and Arius (Arians) were among the People of the Book. However, they have not survived to the present time.

The second worst disease of the soul after shirk is to hold and practice (heretical beliefs which are called) bid’at, which is followed by looseness in abstaining from sins, in the order of evil.

A person who dies without making tawba for venial or grave sins other than disbelief may be forgiven by Allahu ta’ala either through intercession (shafa’at) or directly by His Mercy. If a venial sin is not forgiven then there will be punishment in Hell.

Sins that involve violating rights of other human beings will not be forgiven easily. Most likely, people who commit them will be punished more severely.

For example, not giving wife’s due money (mahr) regarding the marriage contract or prohibiting human beings from learning their correct religion, which is their right (haqq), is the gravest gross violation of human rights. Rasullullah ‘sall-Allahu ‘alaihi wa sal-lam’ stated as follows: “A time will come when people will not care whether they earn the money by permissible (halal) means or not,” and “A time will come when practicing Islam will be as difficult as holding a fireball with bare hands.”

Therefore, to avoid committing all prohibited actions (harams) and those actions that are called makruh tahrimi (because they are quite close to harams) is (taqwa). Not to perform obligatory duties (fards) and strongly recommended actions (wajibis) is forbidden (haram).

According to some infor-

mation, not performing “muakkad Sunnats,” i.e., acts of worship which our blessed Prophet practiced regularly, without an excuse, is strongly disliked (makruh tahrimi). People who do not carry out the commandments of Islam with respect to belief (i’tiqad), ethics (akhlaq), and deeds (‘amal) will be punished. Logically, one must avoid doing things that will cause punishment.

For example, not performing five daily “salats” and women’s and girls’ not covering themselves is a grave sin. It would be a strong requirement for one to abstain from the grave sin by performing the five daily “salats.”

Nevertheless, in this book, we will not deal with the subject matter regarding the things that must not be omitted; instead, we will communicate the things that should be avoided, i.e., prohibited actions and vices.

The things we should not do (prohibited actions) are committed either with a particular organ or with the entire body. The following eight organs are very well known for committing sins: spiritual heart, ears, eyes, tongue, hands, stomach, sexual organs, and feet.

The spiritual heart (qalb) is a spiritual grace blown upon the material heart of human beings. It is incorporeal, not made of matter, like the soul. These organs themselves do not commit the sin.

The sensing power of these organs commits the sin. Anyone who wants to attain happiness in this world and the next must prevent these organs from committing sins.

The spiritual heart has to be developed into a state wherein not committing sins will be its natural habit (malaka). Anyone who can achieve this state is called Allah-fearing (muttaqi) or pious (salih) person.


He has now attained Allahu ta’ala’s love and approval and become Wali to Him. It would also be piety [taqwa] to avoid sins by exerting yourself without its becoming the heart’s natural habit.

Yet being a Wali requires it being a natural habit not to commit sins, which in turn requires purifying the heart. And to purify the heart requires obedience to the rules of Islam. Islam consists of three parts: knowledge (‘ilm), practice (‘amal), and sincerity (ikhlas).

To learn the knowledge teaching the commandments, i.e., Fards, Wajibis, Sunnats, and forbidden actions (harams and makruhs), To practice them in accordance with this knowledge, and (3) to do them only for the sake of Allahu ta’ala. The Quran al-kerim commands and praises all these three parts.

In this book, we will only communicate those sins that are to be abstained from in order to cleanse the hear.

They are called vices, unethical behavior, or immoral acts. The Kabul Times

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	AFN		AFN		AFN		AFN		AFN		AFN		AFN
70.40		87.08		839		238		76.00		01.40		19.20	

Japan’s foreign minister visits Ukraine to show support

Japanese Foreign Minister Yoko Kamikawa paid a visit to Ukraine on Sunday to meet her counterpart Dmytro Kuleba and underscore Tokyo’s continued support, a ministry official said.

“Foreign Minister Yoko Kamikawa arrived in Ukraine,” the Japanese embassy said. “It’s her first visit abroad this year.”

She went to Bucha, near the capital Kyiv, where Russian forces are blamed for a 2022 massacre of civilians, as well as to Irpin, a past scene of heavy fighting.

The previously unannounced visit was a change to a two-week tour plan taking in Poland, Finland, Sweden, the Netherlands, the United States, Canada, Germany and Turkey from Friday.

Japan has joined several countries offering support for Ukraine since Russia’s invasion, expanding sanctions against Moscow including export bans and asset freezes.

Kamikawa, who had been due to arrive from Poland, would “once again reiterate to the Ukrainian side that Japan’s consistent policy of standing with and supporting Ukraine remains unchanged,” a Japanese foreign ministry statement said.

She was to brief the Ukrainian side on the details of assistance projects Japan will offer to Kyiv, it said. Japan plans to host a conference to promote Ukraine’s economic reconstruction in Tokyo in February, with Ukrainian Prime Minister Denys Shmyhal planning to attend.

Kamikawa was to consult with Ukrainian officials on details of the conference and attend “the handover ceremony of large-scale power-related equipment for winterization

assistance.”

Kamikawa would also “demonstrate Japan’s determination to uphold the international order based on the ‘rule of law’ from the perspective that unilateral changes to the status quo by force, such as Russia’s aggression against Ukraine, cannot be accepted,” the ministry said.

Prime Minister Fumio Kishida has repeatedly stressed the importance of rules-based international order as Tokyo is concerned about its own territorial disputes with its neighbors including an increasingly assertive China.

At the Group of Seven summit in Japan in May last year, the bloc’s leaders agreed to “starve Russia of G7 technology, industrial equipment and services that support its war machine.”

Aljazeera

Weapon, ammunition catch discovered in Baghlan, Takhar, ministry



KABUL: Various light and heavy weapons and a huge amount

of ammunition have been discovered and seized by security per-

sonnel of the 217th Army Corps in the country’s northern prov-

inces of Takhar and Baghlan, the Ministry of National Defense said in a statement Sunday.

The security personnel of the army corps in a series of search operations, have discovered and seized various weapons and heavy amounts of ammunition including 12 AK-47, 2 RPG-7, 4 machine guns, and 6 pistols in various parts of Takhar and Baghlan provinces, the statement said.

A few weeks ago, a large number of weapons and ammunition, during various clearance operations, had been discovered, as well as scores of criminal suspects had been arrested in connection with illegally keeping and carrying the weapons in the provinces, the statement added.

The security forces of the Islamic Emirate are seriously working day and night to identify and arrest those who attempt to create public disorders and bring them to the law. **The Kabul Times**



Hamas command in north Gaza destroyed, Israel says

The Israeli army says it has “completed the dismantling” of Hamas’s command structure in the northern Gaza Strip.

Army spokesman Daniel Hagari told reporters that Palestinian militants are now operating in the area only sporadically and “without commanders”.

He said Israel had killed around 8,000 militants in north Gaza. The BBC cannot independently verify this number.

The Israeli Defence Forces (IDF) are now focused on dismantling Hamas in south and central Gaza, he said. Israel has killed more than 22,000 people since the war began, according to the Hamas-run health ministry. On Saturday it said it had recorded more than 120 deaths over the past 24 hours.

The territory has been devast-

tated and most of the population of 2.3 million has been displaced.

Israel’s offensive started after Hamas gunmen launched a surprise attack on southern Israel on 7 October, killing 1,200 people, most of them civilians, and taking about 240 people hostage.

More than 120 remain, following some releases in a ceasefire last year.

US Secretary of State Antony Blinken said on Saturday that he was focused on ensuring that the Gaza conflict does not spread and preventing “an endless cycle of violence”.

Mr Blinken was speaking in Greece at the start of a week-long trip to the region. He has since flown to Jordan, meeting King Abdullah on Sunday before heading to Qatar. “Washington should put pressure on Israel to agree to

an immediate ceasefire in Gaza,” King Abdullah told Mr Blinken, warning him of the “catastrophic repercussions” of the continuation of Israel’s military campaign in Gaza, a palace statement said.

Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu reiterated on Saturday that Israel would continue its campaign to “eliminate Hamas, return our hostages and ensure that Gaza will no longer be a threat to Israel”. “We have to put everything aside ... until the complete victory is achieved,” Mr Netanyahu said in a statement.

Meanwhile, six Palestinians were killed in an Israeli raid in the city of Jenin in the occupied-West Bank, the Palestinian health ministry said on Sunday. Palestinian media said the raid involved a large deployment of Israeli forces.

BBC

China sanctions five US arms manufacturers over Taiwan weapons sales

China has announced sanctions against five US arms manufacturers over weapons sales to Taiwan.

Beijing claims the self-ruled island as part of its territory and has not ruled out the use of force to achieve its goals, while the United States is required by law to provide Taiwan with the means to defend itself.

The sanctions come ahead of Taiwan’s January 13 presidential and parliamentary elections, which China has claimed are a choice between war and peace.

Last month, the US State Department approved a \$300m arms package to strengthen Taipei’s joint battle command and control system, prompting Beijing to say it would take unspecified “countermeasures” against the companies involved.

China’s Foreign Ministry on Sunday sanctioned the companies BAE Systems Land and Armament, Alliant Techsystems Oper-



ation, AeroVironment, ViaSat and Data Link Solutions.

“The countermeasures consist of freezing the properties of those companies in China, including their movable and immovable property, and prohibiting organisations and individuals in China from transactions and cooperation with them,” the ministry said in a statement. “The US arms sales to

China’s Taiwan region... seriously harm China’s sovereignty and security interests,” it added.

Beijing has increased pressure on Taiwan since Tsai Ing-wen was first elected president in 2016, claiming she wants independence.

Tsai has said it is up to the people of Taiwan to decide their future.

Her vice president, William

Lai, is running for the top job against Hou Yu-ih of the more China-friendly KMT.

Taiwan has reported regular sightings of Chinese warplanes and balloons around the island in the weeks running up to the election and has warned Beijing against seeking to influence the outcome of the poll.

Aljazeera

Bangladesh poll booths burn on election eve as train arson kills 4



Polling booths were set ablaze in Bangladesh on the eve of Sunday’s general elections, while four people, two children among them, were killed in a train fire that the government decried as arson targeting democratic values.

Friday’s fire broke out at about 9pm, injuring eight passengers as it spread to four compartments of the Benapole Express headed for the capital, Dhaka, at a time when the main opposition party is boycotting the elections.

“The timing of this tragedy,

just a day before the election ... shows an absolute intention to hinder the festivity, safety and security of the democratic processes of the country,” Foreign Minister A K Abdul Momen said. “This reprehensible incident, undoubtedly orchestrated by those with malicious intent, strikes at the very heart of our democratic values,” he added in a statement, vowing that authorities would bring the perpetrators to justice.

The main opposition Bang-

ladesh Nationalist Party (BNP) has asked people in the South Asian nation to shun the poll and called a two-day strike nationwide from Saturday.

The eight people critically injured in the blaze are being treated in hospital, officials said.

“All eight, including two children, have burnt their respiratory tracts,” said Dr Samanta Lal Sen of a state-run specialist burn hospital in the capital.

“We are closely monitoring them,” he told reporters.

Seven firefighting teams took an hour to subdue the fire in Dhaka’s area of Wari, fire official Shah-jahan Sikder said.

The poll boycott by the BNP is its second in three elections. The party says Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina’s Awami League is trying to legitimise a sham vote to gain a fourth straight term.

Hasina, who has refused BNP demands to resign and cede power to a neutral authority to run the election, accuses the opposition of instigating anti-government protests that have rocked Dhaka

since late October and killed at least 10 people.

A senior BNP official, Ruhul Kabir Rizvi, said Friday’s express train fire was “undoubtedly an act of sabotage and cruelty” while blaming the ruling party for it.

Four people died last month in a train blaze set by protesters during a countrywide strike called by the opposition.

On Saturday, Dhaka’s usually busy roads were largely deserted, although security forces patrolled in armoured vehicles.

About 800,000 security officials will guard polling booths on Sunday, while some of the armed forces have fanned out nationwide to help keep the peace.

Police said unidentified arsonists also set fire to at least five primary schools, including four polling booths.

They are investigating fires in Gazipur, on the outskirts of Dhaka, suspected to have been set in the middle of the night by those aiming to disrupt Sunday’s election.

Dawn

